Licensing Caseloads

Licensing Caseloads: Finding the Right Ratio of Licensors to Providers



Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) regulations require states and territories to ensure that the ratio of inspectors to providers is sufficient for timely inspection. We know that this ratio will differ among states, territories, and tribes, depending on a variety of factors. But what *are* these factors? And how can they help you understand the right ratio of inspectors to providers in your state, territory, or tribe? *How many child*

care providers can a licensor effectively monitor? We'll explore these questions in this brief.

Table of Contents

Terms	2
Trends and Recommendations	2
What Influences Caseloads?	2
Where Do You Get this Information?	
How Can You Calculate Caseloads?	
How Do You Improve Timeliness and Effectiveness?	7
Resources	8
Appendix A. Georgia's Weighted Caseload Formula	10

¹ Child Care and Development Fund, 45 C.F.R. § 98.42(b)(3) (2016).



Terms

The terms workload and caseload are often used together, so let's begin by clarifying what each term means.

Caseload is the number of child care centers or homes a licensor is responsible for monitoring. In other words, it's the *ratio* of inspectors to providers. Ideally, it's the number of providers a licensor can *effectively* monitor.

Workload refers to a licensor's day-to-day responsibilities. Understanding the activities for which a licensor is responsible and approximately how much time each activity takes helps inform how many staff are necessary to administer a licensing system. It also informs the number of providers a licensor can effectively monitor.

Trends and Recommendations

Data from the 2014 Child Care Licensing Study tells us that the average caseload is 97 centers and homes. However, caseloads vary widely from state to state, ranging from 25 to 300 (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, 2015).

The National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) recommends that an average caseload not exceed 50 to 60 (Payne, 2011). However, it encourages licensing agencies to take local variables into account when determining the appropriate caseload. We'll examine these local variables more closely in the next section.

What Influences Caseloads?

The right caseload for licensors depends on several factors that are unique to your state, territory, or tribe. We've divided these factors into five general categories: (1) time spent onsite, (2) number of inspections, (3) travel time, (4) additional licensor responsibilities, and (5) number of working weeks per year. More time onsite, frequent inspections, more travel time, additional licensor responsibilities, and fewer working weeks per year necessitate lower caseloads.



Time Spent Onsite at Homes or Centers

- The number of requirements inspected: How often do you use an abbreviated checklist? Do you monitor license-exempt providers who are regulated by a shorter list of requirements? This will influence how much time is spent onsite.
- Structure of the visit: The structure for each visit contributes to the time required. Factor in the time it will
 take to observe staff-child interactions, review records, or conduct an exit interview.
- Onsite technical assistance: Do licensors spend time onsite providing support to and sharing resources with providers? Consider this time in addition to the time it takes to complete the checklist.
- ♦ Staff turnover: You may find that newer staff spend more time onsite, as they become familiar with the regulations. Estimate how many licensors will be hired this year, based on turnover history and anticipated changes (for example, additional funding or upcoming retirements).
- Automation: Mobile monitoring tools can speed up the inspection process. Data sharing can also cut down on inspection time. For example, if providers' professional development and training data are shared through the professional development registry, licensors don't have to spend time onsite looking for training documentation in staff files.



- Provider types and sizes: Consider the number of homes and the size of centers that are monitored. The proportion of homes to centers and large centers to small centers will likely vary by region. For example, urban areas may have more large centers, which take more time to monitor.
- ♦ **Compliance:** You likely have providers with a history of low compliance. The more violations the provider has, the more time is spent onsite documenting, allowing time for immediate corrections, providing technical assistance (TA), and discussing violations.
- ◆ **Type of inspection:** You may find it helpful to consider the number of initial, renewal, follow-up, complaint, and other visit types because the type of inspection will influence how much time is spent onsite. For example, an annual renewal may take more time than a follow-up visit.



Number of Inspections

- Routine visits: The frequency with which providers are monitored is reliant in part on state policies about the minimum number of routine monitoring visits (such as once or twice annually).
- ♦ Complaints: Consider the average number of complaints, per region or per provider, when planning for an effective caseload. In some states, licensors investigate all complaints. In others, a separate entity investigates complaints involving child abuse and neglect.
- Follow-up visits: These visits are required when a provider isn't home or when the licensor must return to the home or center to verify compliance with a violation that was cited during a previous visit.
- Investigations: If licensors are responsible for investigations of illegally operating facilities, then you must factor this into the number of inspections.
- Prelicensing visits: Licensors may visit providers before licenses are issued to answer questions and assess their readiness for licensure.
- Number of providers: The number of visits is, of course, directly tied to the number of providers, so consider trends and anticipated policy changes—in both subsidy and licensing—that will impact the number of centers or homes.



Travel Time

- Rural areas: An area where homes are scattered throughout large rural areas will require increased travel times.
- Urban areas: Heavy traffic in dense urban areas affects travel time.
- Weather: Anticipated weather conditions, such as flooding and snowstorms during certain months, can make travel difficult or impossible.
- ♦ Construction: Ongoing road construction may cause delays.



Additional Responsibilities of Licensors

Administrative tasks: The time needed to complete administrative tasks depends on the level of available support. Consider whether licensors do it all or whether they have administrative support to help complete certain duties. Administrative tasks may include processing licensing applications and amendments; fielding questions from providers, families, and the public about regulations and violations; and scheduling.



- Meetings: Consider how much time licensors spend meeting with their peers, supervisors, providers, community members, and other programs and agencies.
- Ongoing trainings: Do licensors engage in ongoing required or voluntary training? Training might be completed formally or informally, through webinars, online training, in-person courses, conferences, or shadowing. These delivery methods require varying time commitments. An in-person course, for instance, will likely take more time than an online training.
- New licensor preparation: Preparing new licensors for their jobs requires the time of both new and existing licensors. How much time do new licensors spend shadowing and receiving training, and do existing licensors take time to support their new colleagues? Consider how many new licensors you have, on average, annually or how many you anticipate gaining in the next year.
- Doubling up: Are there times when two licensors need to be present during an inspection or investigation due to safety concerns or to efficiently inspect a large facility? If this happens regularly, consider this to be an additional responsibility.
- ♦ Investigations: Consider the desk-time involved in investigations as well as the inspection time. Investigations can take a considerable amount of preparation and follow-up time, including verifying other sources of information.
- Enforcement and appeals: Drafting letters, summarizing case records, and communicating with legal staff, providers, and supervisors regarding enforcement can be time consuming. If providers appeal enforcement actions, licensors will spend time preparing for and participating in hearings.
- Reviewing and processing complaints: This includes reviewing documentation, following up with the provider and complainant as necessary, and determining if a formal investigation is required.
- ♦ **Special projects:** Licensors may participate in special projects, such as regulation revision, development of guidelines or procedures, workgroup participation, public awareness activities, and events like early childhood conferences.
- Communication with providers: Licensors may spend a substantial amount of time communicating by phone and email with providers. This includes fielding questions, processing incident reports, reviewing documentation, follow-up communication after visits.
- Communication with partners: An important part of a licensor's job is communicating with city officials; other inspectors; and partners, like staff from the subsidy program, the child care resource and referral agency, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), the prekindergarten program, and health and environmental agencies.
- **Provider and community trainings:** Are licensors responsible for training providers on licensing processes and regulations or training partners on licensing-related topics? If so, factor in the time that this takes.



Number of Working Weeks per Year

♦ Holidays, vacation, and sick leave: State and local government workers receive, on average and after one year, 11 paid holidays, 11 days of paid sick leave, and 13 days of paid vacation.² This differs from state to state, as does the amount of leave actually taken.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. (March 2017). Employee Benefits Survey, Paid Leave Benefits. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2017/benefits_leave.htm



Where Do You Get this Information?

There are a few ways you can collect this information.

- ♦ Use the data you have and your professional judgement: You may already be collecting much of the information in your licensing data system. For example, the data system may be able to tell you the average length of time to conduct an inspection, average annual number of new applications and licensing renewals, average number of enforcement actions, and the number of working weeks per year. That, paired with the best judgement of staff, can inform your estimate of the *best* caseload for your licensors.
- ♦ Conduct your own workload analysis: You can begin by creating a team of individuals from various levels within your organization, including licensors, who know the activities needed to administer a licensing system effectively. This team will compile a comprehensive list of licensors' activities and tasks. You can ask a sample of staff to log their activities and amount of time spent on each for at least 6 weeks. This will supplement the information you already collect in your data system. Upon completing a workload analysis, you'll know the number of licensing staff needed to effectively implement a licensing system effectively. The National Association for Regulatory Administration's *Licensing Workload Assessment: Executive Summary* (2015) outlines the elements included in a workload formula.
- Contract with an outside entity to do a workload analysis: Some licensing agencies contract with an outside entity to conduct a workload analysis because they don't have the time to complete a comprehensive analysis on their own. A contractor will typically work closely with staff, conducting interviews and asking them to complete time logs. They also may rely on data you collect in your system.

Keep in mind that the information you gather from staff and from your data system will reflect how time is currently spent. You may want to balance this with the workload you envision in the coming year. For example, do you want licensors to be able to spend more time in programs providing technical assistance? Do you anticipate having lower turnover so staff will spend less time training and mentoring? In estimating the *right* caseload, think about what you'll need over the coming year. And remember to review caseloads on a regular basis, to determine whether changes in the factors previously outlined necessitate revision.

How Can You Calculate Caseloads?

There are several ways to calculate a caseload. A workload analysis can help inform caseload planning, but you can estimate an effective caseload without doing a workload analysis. Also, keep in mind that caseload can be calculated at the state/territory/tribal level or at the local or regional level.

Basic Caseload Calculation

- Using a workload assessment to estimate caseload: The National Association for Regulatory Administration's *Licensing Workload Assessment: Executive Summary* describes the steps of a workload formula, which when complete tells you the total number of licensors you need. The caseload can be derived by dividing the number of providers by the number of licensors.
- Calculating current caseload: Your current caseload can easily be calculated by dividing the number of providers in your state or region by the number of licensors. If licensors are responsible for only centers or only homes, divide the number of licensors responsible for centers or homes by the number of centers or homes. However, this calculation simply tells you what the current caseload is. It does not necessarily tell you what the right caseload is.

Future-Thinking

The information you gather from licensors and from your data system will reflect how time is currently spent. You may want to balance this with the workload you envision for the coming year. And remember to review caseloads on a regular basis to account for changes in the licensing system.



♦ Estimating the right caseload: It may be helpful to think about the number of providers a licensor can realistically visit in an average week given the factors outlined in the previous section. The National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance developed the *Monitoring Cost Estimation Calculator* to help you with this calculation (and can then help you estimate the cost of a monitoring system). Guidance for the tool is available. This is what one portion of the tool looks like (this version, unlike the actual tool, is not interactive).

Table 1: Calculating Caseload Using the Monitoring Cost Estimation Calculator

Caseload Factors	Value
Visits per week: This reflects the number of visits that a licensor can make in 1 week. You can change this number depending on travel time, desk time, and other responsibilities.	4
Number of working weeks per year: This takes annual leave, sick leave, and holidays into account. You can change this number.	47
Total number of visits per year: Here, the spreadsheet automatically multiplies visits per week by number of working weeks per year. You cannot override this number because it's automatically calculated.	188
Visits per provider per year, including follow-up visits and complaint responses: This is the average number of visits that each provider receives annually, including annual visits, follow-up visits, and responses to complaints. For example, if each provider receives one annual visit and an average of two follow-up visits annually, you would enter 3.	
Annual caseload: The caseload is the number of providers each licensor is responsible for visiting annually. The spreadsheet automatically divides the total number of visits a licensor can make in a year by the number of visits per provider.	

Weighted Caseload Calculation

Not all facilities require the same amount of attention to receive and maintain a license. A weighted caseload calculation applies weights to each individual facility as a way to more accurately gauge how much time it takes to monitor compliance and recommend licensing actions. There are several ways to weight facilities. Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) identified the four facility characteristics that have the greatest impact on regulation time in the state: facility type/size, number and type of complaint investigations, number and type of visits, and travel time.

For example, a large center with a high volume of complaint investigations takes more time to license, so its weight is greater than one. A family child care home with no history of complaints that is located in an urban area is weighted less than one. If you decide to use a weighted caseload, you may decide to weight additional factors, such as a program's history of compliance. Georgia's formula for a weighted caseload is included in Appendix A. Using this approach may help you think more realistically about the number of providers a licensor can effectively monitor.



How Do You Improve Timeliness and Effectiveness?

When you have a sense of how licensors spend their time, it may be helpful to think about how you *want* licensors to spend their time. Let's reconsider the CCDF regulation requirement: "Ensure that the ratio of inspectors to providers is sufficient for timely inspection." And let's revisit our original question: How many providers can a licensor effectively monitor? What do the terms *timely* and *effective* mean to you?



Envision the ideal monitoring system. For example, annual visits occur no less than 2 months prior to license expiration; providers' compliance increases; and licensors are skilled and love their jobs. There are concrete actions you can take to move toward your vision, and they'll also contribute to a more efficient monitoring system. Here are some ideas for consideration.

- Using an abbreviated checklist for providers who have a history of compliance will decrease onsite inspection time.
- ◆ Decreasing **licensor turnover** can help you retain experienced staff. It also lessens the time that existing licensors will spend training and supporting new licensors, which means you won't lose valuable inspection time while new licensors are being trained. And the benefits of lower turnover are self-perpetuating: when a region is fully staffed, caseloads are lower, licensors are less likely to be stressed, and they are more likely to stay. Think about what improves job satisfaction. Licensors may enjoy interacting with community members and participating in special projects, attending conferences, and participating in other professional development opportunities. You may also want to consider the benefits of telecommuting, both in terms of job satisfaction as well as caseload distribution. Another perk is that increased job-satisfaction may lead to less stress, healthier licensors, and less sick time taken.
- Providing technical assistance and training, responding to providers' unique needs, maintaining clear communication, clearly sharing expectations, and making tools and resources for providers' available online helps providers' compliance improve. When compliance improves, licensors spend less time onsite responding to noncompliance issues, less desk time focused on enforcement and appeals, and less time making follow-up visits and responding to complaints. You can also improve compliance by encouraging providers to use a self-assessment checklist to assess their own environments and practices.⁴
- Considering how licensors are distributed across a state or region can give you insight. When you consider the time it takes to monitor any given facility (given the factors and weights outlined in this brief), you may find that some licensors carry a heavier caseload than others due to their locations. Redrawing regional lines or allowing licensors to use their home offices as hubs may help alleviate some of these inequities.
- Increasing automation can decrease the amount of time spent onsite and in the office. As noted previously, mobile monitoring tools can speed up the inspection process, ensure timely and thorough documentation, increase access to data, and allow you to more efficiently share documentation with partners, such as subsidy and QRIS staff.
- Strengthening relationships with your partners who monitor providers can reduce duplication and show
 providers that you are communicating with one another. Partner programs, like QRIS, may be able to help
 with monitoring.

August 2018 7

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³ Child Care and Development Fund, 45 C.F.R. § 98.42(b)(3) (2016).

⁴ We can learn from other sectors. South Carolina hospitals saw a drop in post-surgical deaths upon implementing a Surgical Safety Checklist program. For more information, visit <u>South Carolina Hospitals See Major Drop in Post-Surgical Deaths with Nation's First Proven Statewide Surgical Safety Checklist Program</u> (2017).



- Specializing licensor duties can improve workload and morale. Even if you are unable to have specialized units, you may be able to capitalize on licensors' strengths and preferences. For example, a licensor with strong investigative skills may take the lead on critical investigations in others' caseloads while her peers take on some of her regulatory visits.
- Using meeting times wisely can help everyone be more efficient. Meetings and other communication can help increase consistency, job satisfaction, coordination, and community awareness about the importance of licensing. However, we know it's possible to schedule too many meetings or meetings that are too long. Try to find the right balance.

It may be helpful to go through the list of factors outlined in the section titled "What Influences Caseloads?" and consider the activities you value as well as the activities you'd like to modify. For example, does the activity support licensors' job satisfaction? Does it improve providers' compliance? Do you want licensors spending more time providing technical assistance and support to providers? Do you want to decrease the number of follow-up visits? Taking into consideration the factors that influence caseloads and the ways in which licensors can spend their time more efficiently can help you meet your unique goals.

Resources

These resources can help inform your thinking and planning regarding caseloads. They focus on monitoring, quality assurance, licensor competencies, and professional development. Several other resources about child care licensing are available on the Child Care Licensing Tools and Resources web page.

- Monitoring Cost Estimation Calculator (2018), by the National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance (ECQA Center), is a tool designed to help you estimate caseloads and the cost of monitoring. Guidance is available online and the tool is available upon request from the ECQA Center at QualityAssuranceCenter@ecetta.info.
- Key Competencies for Licensors of Child Care Programs (2017), by the ECQA Center, outlines the knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics that a licensor needs to perform his or her job duties successfully.
- Resources from the 2017 Efficient and Effective Monitoring in Licensing Peer Learning Group (2017), by the ECQA Center, focus on caseloads, differential monitoring, weighted enforcement systems, quality assurance, and licensing data.
- Coordinated Monitoring Systems for Early Care and Education [OPRE Research Brief #2016-19] (2016), by K.L. Maxwell, L, Sosinsky, & K. Tout, provides a framework and considerations to support discussions and planning of coordinated monitoring efforts; its appendix provides an overview of eight major early care and education monitoring systems.
- ◆ <u>Mapping the Early Care And Education Monitoring Landscape [OPRE Research Brief #2016-20]</u> (2016), by K.L. Maxwell, L. Sosinsky, & K. Tout, is designed to help state/territory leaders document the early care and education (ECE) monitoring systems that are currently in place, so they can more effectively plan strategies to coordinate monitoring across the various sets of regulations.
- Best Practices for Human Care Regulation (2015) by NARA and National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, defines the characteristics of high-performing licensing organizations and helps licensing agencies gauge where their licensing systems need improvement.
- ♦ <u>Licensing Workload Assessment: Executive Summary</u> (2015), by the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA), provides the steps for developing a workload formula.
- Monitoring License-Exempt Homes (2015), by the ECQA Center, explores decision points when developing a monitoring system.

Licensing Caseloads: Finding the Right Ratio



- Research Brief #1: Trends in Child Care Center Licensing Regulations and Policies for 2014 (2015), by the ECQA Center, examines the state of licensing child care centers in 2014 and identifies trends from several years of data collection.
- Strong licensing: The foundation for a quality early care and education system, Preliminary principles and suggestions to strengthen requirements and enforcement for licensed child care (2011), by A.L. Payne, for NARA, describes the challenges of a licensing system and provides strategies for strengthening licensing.
- ♦ <u>Contemporary issues in licensing: Child Care Licensing Inspection Policies.</u> (2014), by the National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement (NCCCQI), focuses on states' inspection policies and practices. Topics include authorization for inspections; frequency and type of inspection: announced or unannounced; use of technology to aid in the inspection process; and public access to inspection and enforcement actions.
- Contemporary Issues in Licensing: Monitoring Strategies for Determining Compliance—Differential Monitoring, Risk Assessment, and Key Indicators (2014), by the NCCCQI, describes various methods states use to define compliance and monitor child care facilities.
- Contemporary Issues in Licensing: Quality Assurance in Child Care Licensing (2014), by the NCCCQI, focuses on activities, authority, and staffing as parts of a quality assurance system designed to ensure that child care licensing rules are applied consistently and fairly. Topics include the qualifications and professional development of licensing staff and state and territory strategies for achieving consistency in the child care licensing program.



Appendix A. Georgia's Weighted Caseload Formula

Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) assigns weights to facility type/size, number and type of complaint investigations, number and type of visits, and travel time. The length of visits for different program types was analyzed and the resulting averages were then assigned a weight. The following illustrates how Georgia's DECAL weights its caseload.

1. Each **facility type** is weighted, according to its size, since the size of a facility impacts how much time a licensor spends onsite.

Weight for Facility Type/Size

Type of Facility	Weight
Family child care learning home	0.66
Child care learning center with capacity less than 150	1.00
Child care learning center with capacity of 150 or more	1.25

2. After each facility is weighted by type/size, a **complaint investigation weight** is applied for each complaint received in the past 12 months. This is a factor because the number of complaints impacts the frequency of visits.⁵

Weight for Number of Facility Complaint Investigations

Type of Complaint Investigation	Weight
Number of category 3 and 4* complaint investigations in prior 12 months	0.33
Number of category 1 and 2** complaint investigations in prior 12 months	0.17

^{*}These investigations are conducted by regulatory licensors.

Note: Although licensors do not investigate category 1 and 2 complaints, they often have to talk with the investigating consultant about the program, which takes time.

3. A **visit weight** is also applied for each visit conducted at the facility in the past 12 months. The number of visits often exceeds the two regulatory visits required annually, so the time spent at each program is more accurately captured by accounting for all visits.

August 2018 10

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^{**}These investigations are conducted by a specialized complaint investigation unit.

⁵ Although unlicensed facilities are not assigned a facility weight, they do impact the overall caseload because they receive other types of visits that are counted in the analysis.



Weight for Number of Facility Visits

Visit Type	Weight
Technical assistance visit by phone	0.10
Amendment visit	0.22
Onsite visits	0.33

4. The facility type weight, complaint investigation weight, and visit type weight are totaled to generate a facility weight. This facility weight is then multiplied by the appropriate **travel weight** based on the sum of facilities located in the facility's county. The underlying assumption is that rural counties have fewer facilities, so it takes more time to travel to and within those counties.

Weight for Travel

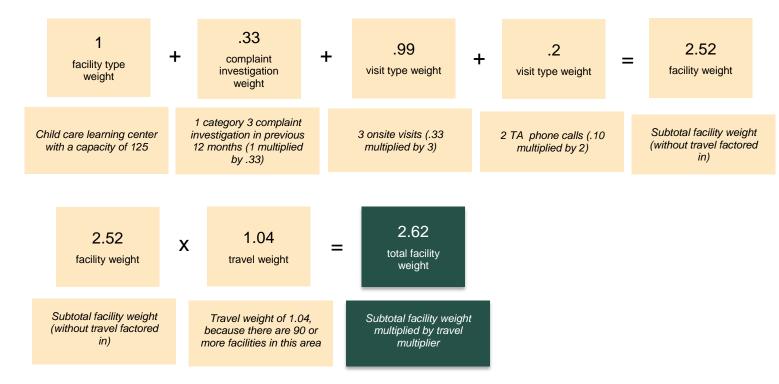
	Number of Facilities in County	Weight
90+		1.04
40–89		1.08
28–39		1.12
14–27		1.16
0–13		1.20

Multiplying the facility weight by the travel weight provides a total weight for each facility.

Licensing Caseloads: Finding the Right Ratio



The following is an example of one child care center. It has a capacity of 125, has 1 category 3 complaint investigation in the previous 12 months, has had 3 onsite visits and 2 technical assistance phone calls, and is located in the Atlanta metro area. Its total weight is 2.62.



All the facility weights are then totaled for individual counties and zip code areas to determine appropriate region designations. Let's say, for example, that there are 400 child care facilities in the Atlanta metro area. However, once each facility has been weighted, the sum of the child care facilities in the Atlanta metro area is 600.

Once the region weight is determined, it is divided by the total number of licensors in that region. So if there are 7 licensors who cover the Atlanta metro area, their *weighted* caseload (600 divided by 7) is approximately 86. For comparison's sake, their *unweighted* caseload (400 divided by 7) is 57.

The National Center on Early Childhood Quality
Assurance (ECQA Center) supports State and
community leaders and their partners in the planning
and implementation of rigorous approaches to quality in
all early care and education settings for children from
birth to school age. The ECQA Center is funded by the
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,
Administration for Children and Families.

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